

After They Go Straight

I have been clean for a year. With the help of a 12-step program, I learned how to stay clean, and made a lot of good friends. I work a full-time job now and things are going well. I don't spend much time alone. I attend a lot of meetings, I don't hang out with my old friends. People who have been clean for a long time tell me what to do and I do it. I try to have as much fun as I can. My life today is great.

- ◆ Being “straight,” especially after a long period of drug or alcohol use, is extremely difficult for many people.
- ◆ Boredom is a very real problem for people who may not be in good enough shape to find employment or return to education.
- ◆ Wanting it all too quickly — new life, new job, new car — can be too much pressure for recovering drug users.
- ◆ Drugs suppress feelings of all kinds, so expect a roller coaster of emotions, including guilt, shame, or anger and fear about the past and future. Regular support from a good counsellor is invaluable.
- ◆ Be sure your son or daughter knows the particular danger of a relapse after a long period of abstinence. The size of the dose to which she or he had previously become accustomed may now be enough to cause an overdose.

“Expect
a roller coaster
of emotions
including guilt
and shame,
anger and fear.”



“If she

messes up, I
have to do what
I say I’m going
to do. But she’ll
mess up because
she’s sick. How
will I feel about
a tough stance
then?”

How about you?

I feel terrible saying this, but since Abbey’s been clean I’m finding it much more difficult than I expected. She’s up and down like a roller coaster, demands all my time, and is so hyperactive compared to when she was strung out or hanging about the house. She either never stops talking or she’s in a black mood, and she wants everything now. The other day I almost wished she’d hit up again just so I could get some peace.

Your child is going straight. Right now you’re probably feeling relieved and optimistic, but prepare yourself for dealing with the “new” person on new terms. Some find it very difficult to give up the user/parent relationship, so get help if you need it. Look for supportive environments where you can talk and be heard. The support group you relied on during those bad old days is great, even after your child has “gone straight.”

Remember, you may find it difficult during this period to avoid becoming overly involved in your child’s staying straight. And you may feel even more anxious than you did before, worried that saying “no” to your child could contribute to a relapse. However, if you have practised self-care all along the way, this new relationship, and the detachment process that goes with it, should be easier.



Last Words of Advice

- ◆ Find out about drugs and addiction as early as possible. Take the time to equip yourself so that you speak from a base of knowledge.
- ◆ Make it clear you really want to know what your child is thinking and feeling.
- ◆ Remember that many young people experiment with drugs and remain recreational users.
- ◆ Discuss drug use with your child, particularly health and safety issues. If your child is using, encourage harm minimization (safe sex, not mixing drugs, eating properly, needle exchange).
- ◆ When confronted with an intoxicated person, deal only with immediate safety issues.
- ◆ If you are worried or afraid, call a friend or the authorities for support.
- ◆ Let your child know how the drug use is affecting the rest of the family, and what behaviours you are not prepared to accept.
- ◆ Hang onto your wallet, since it takes cash to buy drugs. Some parents find it helpful to secure their valuables, and from experience take their child's pleas of financial hardship with a grain of salt.
- ◆ Avoid the “bad” label, and try to remember that the addiction is not the person.
- ◆ Stay connected, even if your child is not living in your home, through phone calls and care packages.
- ◆ Be supportive, maintain contact, and never give up hope.
- ◆ Try not to feel guilty. Get on with your own life.

“Stay
connected,
appreciative,
supportive . . . ”



*“Be
honest,
stick with your
own truth, and
draw boundaries
where possible.”*

My son is almost 21 and is in prison, where I visit him every two weeks. My husband had our son arrested. He was on heroin and cocaine, living at home, and it was unmanageable. The police were constantly there, and we got tired of living that way.

I don't think my son knew what to expect in prison. Ironically, [before his arrest], drugs weren't easy to get. He's surrounded by drugs in prison. When he was first in jail, he phoned regularly to get me to make deposits to a bank account so he could buy drugs. If he didn't get the money, he stood a good chance of getting beaten up.

Now he has been off drugs for 53 days, on his own, using will power. If somebody had told me that six months ago, I wouldn't have believed it. I'm so proud of him. At one time I thought "I wish he was dead, then we would have peace in the family." Now he has standards, and expectations. He is doing a lot of talking. From his weak position he's reaching out, doing all the instigating. Hopefully, we're now on the mend.
